

Explore Geoheritage Day: Bringing the People to the Outcrop

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Introduction

Creating awareness and understanding of the Earth in our society is challenging. There seems to be a disconnect between the relevance of Earth Science education and many of the complex issues facing society today. The approach of Carleton University's Department of Earth Sciences outreach program has been to build opportunities to share our field of study with community groups, teachers, students and the general public via presentations, school visits, and workshops. "Explore Geoheritage Day" is a recent initiative, which reaches out to the wider community and takes advantage of the appeal of the great outdoors. Designed to showcase some of the interesting geological features of the National Capital Region, we invite residents outdoors to look more closely at these treasures under their feet.

Concept and Realization

Explore Geoheritage Day has been held the past two years in Ottawa on a Sunday in mid-October, taking advantage of fine autumn weather, low water table in the local rivers and beautiful fall colours in the Gatineau Hills. Locations are chosen for geological features, ease of access, and are typically within parks and green spaces that people already regularly visit. Volunteers from our own faculty, staff, and students, as well as industry, government and retired geoscientists "host" the various sites, educating people about the geological history of the National Capital Region and the forces that have shaped the landscape, provided us with resources, and influenced land use.

Along with outcrop sites on the Ottawa and Rideau rivers, and in Gatineau Park, the event includes a Building Stone Walking tour of downtown Ottawa, a hike along the Carp Ridge and geocache and fossil making activities for children at City of Ottawa Heritage sites. Participants are provided with flyers containing information about each site, and mineral samples to take home. This past year we created a passport that allowed visitors to collect stickers and enter a contest by visiting multiple sites. Those who came out, or stumbled across the event while out walking, were genuinely interested and surprised at how much there was to see and learn about this underappreciated part of nature.

The cost to run Explore Geoheritage Day is minimal, supported by the Faculty of Science at Carleton University and the Ottawa Gatineau Geoheritage Project and has included the creation of flyers, signs, informative posters for the sites and t-shirts for volunteers. Volunteers are instrumental in the success of Explore Geoheritage Day and their enthusiasm and knowledge provides a depth of understanding of local geoheritage to those who come out to participate. Engaging a wide variety of local media, Nature clubs and Heritage organizations to ensure wide publicity of the event is key to success.

Conclusion

Showcasing geological phenomena generally unnoticed but routinely walked over by the general public, is the central idea of this initiative. With guidance from individuals who can explain what geological features can tell us, people are able to appreciate the rocks and their place in the natural world in a new light. The success of "Explore Geoheritage Day" leads us to believe that this type of event could easily be attempted in other locations where geological features are exposed and where there are enthusiastic geoscientists willing to give up a few hours of their time. It is a low cost, effective way of reaching out to the general public, sharing what we do, and communicating the relevance of Earth Science.